



**Arts Business Plan 2005 - 2015**  
**Comments by Larry Meeker,**  
**Chairman for Arts Business Plan Committee**

Johnson County, KS is a county that not only brandishes its own banner arts and culture venues, but also provides nearly half the audiences for the major Kansas City metropolitan arts venues. In this context, it's perhaps no surprise that producing an Arts Business Plan for the County was not an easy task.

In 2002, the Board of Directors for the Arts Council of Johnson County first considered how to approach the planning process. Do we look to the arts community for the answers? It's a traditional approach and one with good rationales. Clearly, the arts help define who we are, creating a lasting mark of our culture. They also help bridge cultures, enhance learning and actually improve our children's test scores...you know the arguments and they're virtually undisputed.

Or, do we embrace an even more inclusive approach and reach out to the broader public—business leaders, educational leaders, political and community leaders—to get their take on the issues? After all, increasing evidence suggests the arts are influencing a world beyond their own boundaries by revitalizing neighborhoods, attracting tourists and creating environments that attract new generation workers and 21st century companies. This latter argument speaks to a case for supporting the arts even if you're not personally interested in participating.

In the end we opted to do both and the public part of the process began this past winter with a symposium on "The Arts and Economic Development" and two forums on "Suburban Arts in a Metropolitan Context." Over 500 people registered for these events, many coming from other parts of the metropolitan area and a few from beyond that! Our speakers and facilitators included economic development experts, arts experts and even the President of the American Bankers Association! But our audiences were the key participants, putting new information on the table, voicing opinions, testing new ideas and suggesting even more partnerships and continuing discussions on these vital topics. We truly found an audience hungry for the conversation.

From a suburban—Johnson County—perspective, two major themes emerged from these public events and the numerous conversations, meetings and public comments to follow: the need for greater accessibility to and excellence in the arts. Simply put, people wanted to see more arts opportunities closer to home and they wanted them of high quality.

The result of this process is a business plan, complete with a vision, anticipated outcomes, strategies for getting there and measurements for evaluating success. The vision itself is



simple: “Johnson County becomes a nationally recognized suburban region for using the arts to attract tourists, define its culture and sustain the County’s national economic leadership in attracting people, families and businesses.”

By 2015, we expect recognizable changes. For example, we expect “Johnson County will be recognized as the first truly suburban community to make arts and culture an axis for economic development.” And we’ll measure our progress. For example, we’ll know we’re getting there when “By 2010 Johnson County Government is the Americans for the Arts recipient of the National Award for County Arts Leadership.”